

## DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

### BOARD MEETING MINUTES

FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 2014

#### DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sandra Edwards  
Bill Johnson  
Irma Nelson  
Terry Sheeler  
Dickie Walker

#### EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Jim Hill  
Lisa Reynolds  
Tony Woodell

#### DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Teresa Doan  
Basil Julian

#### EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Kara Aaron  
Harold Brewer

DHS Representative: None

Attorney General's Office Representative: Amanda Gibson

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Rhonda Austin, Tony Brown, Charlie Cain-Davis, Kandy Cayce, Mary Douglas, Chris Dean, Lilian Felicitas, Lisa Fore, Rhonda Garmon, Runar Jensen, Melba Kennedy, Christy Lamas, Ginny McWilliams, Katy Morris, Jim Pearson, Kena Sabb, Lou Talley, Coral Virden, Henry Washington, Elizabeth Whitaker, Cassandra Williams

**CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Mrs. Terry Sheeler called the meeting to order.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA.** Motion was made by Mr. Dickie Walker to approve the agenda. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

**APPROVAL OF 03/14/14 MINUTES.** Motion was made by Dickie Walker to approve the March 14, 2014 minutes. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

**INTRODUCTIONS.** All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

The Board Chairman welcomed Mr. Terry Brigrance of New Mexico. Mr. Brigrance is with the University of Arkansas Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Center, which serves state rehabilitation agencies in Region VI, covering Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Mr. Brigrance facilitated orientation

training for the board on Thursday. He commented that he felt good about the board participation in the training and appreciated everyone's input. Mr. Brigance noted that the board may choose to pursue additional training, because you cannot possibly cover the responsibilities of the board adequately in one day. The board chair noted that she is going to be working directly with Mr. Brigance to see what some other states are doing, particularly those that are organized in the fashion that Arkansas is.

#### **DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Katy Morris**

Mrs. Morris welcomed Tony Woodell as the new CEO of World Services for the Blind. Mr. Woodell replaces Dr. Larry Dickerson on the DSB Board. Dr. Dickerson is retiring from WSB and we are certainly going to miss Dr. Dickerson's involvement on the DSB Board. Another retiring professional who has contributed greatly to DSB is Jimmy Jones. Jimmy is our only certified orientation and mobility specialist, and has been with DSB over 35 years and has worked in the field of blindness for 40 years. He will be retiring June 30. We are also going to be losing our CFO, Lilian Felicitas, to retirement shortly.

DSB is fortunate to have so many wonderful staff members. Some of them have been with us a long time; some of them are relatively new. The Division is doing well as far as being able to attract qualified staff and is privileged to retain excellent staff who could certainly take their skills elsewhere.

We also want to welcome Amanda Gibson as DSB's newly assigned legal representative from the Attorney General's office.

Board member Teresa Doan sent her regrets for her absence. She had hand surgery today.

#### **NATIONAL ISSUES:**

**H.R. 803 Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA).** Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is now called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The current version is the result of a tremendous amount of work done by a coalition of disability support groups nationwide in trying to amend the Workforce Investment Act. There have been a lot of changes, most of which have been good for Rehabilitation purposes. The bill could still be subject to change, but that is not too likely at this stage. As currently drafted, the act retains the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) within the Department of Education, where (in our opinion) it belongs. It retains the status of the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration, Janet LeBreck, as a presidential appointee with direct ear of the President. WIOA retains the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program within RSA rather than transferring it to the new Independent Living Administration.

**Section 511.** The act modifies, rather than eliminates Section 511, which allows sheltered workshops to pay subminimum wage to individuals with disabilities. This was a tremendous compromise for the coalition, because there are two sides to the issue. Not all of the concerns with WIOA, raised by the coalition, have been resolved, but a great deal more progress has been made recently than had occurred in the last 60 days or so. H.R. 803 is being held in congress, but the reasons for that hold supposedly have nothing to do with Title IV, Rehabilitation.

**Professional Credentials.** The thing that VR is particularly unhappy about is that the credentials required of rehabilitation counselors are being diluted to accept less specific degrees. The requirement that rehabilitation counselors be certified appears to be weakened and it looks like it is going to stay that way. This may be setting the stage, at some point in time, to move Rehab into a workforce setting and blend the two fields.

**Advocacy on Behalf of Specialized Services.** I want to compliment Christy Lamas on her ardent advocacy on behalf of specialized services in the field of rehabilitation. Christy had been very industrious in securing appointments with Senator Pryor, Senator Bozeman, and Representative Griffin when she and I attended the April meeting of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation. Getting face to face meetings with Senators and Representatives during a session of Congress is difficult to accomplish. We were able to make our concerns known, and Christy spoke both as a certified counselor and a Rehabilitation Administrator, and got a very positive response.

**Currency Identifiers.** The United States Mint and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are going to be releasing currency identifiers on a pilot program. In Arkansas, the Library for the Blind has been designated to distribute the currency identifiers.

**Author Bill Lawsuit.** The Author Bill lawsuit, which would have blocked libraries from scanning books, was denied. Libraries scan hundreds of thousands of books, so that they can be made available to persons who are blind and visually impaired, so this is a great step forward.

## **STATE ISSUES:**

**Budget-Transition Unit.** Cassondra, Lilian and I met with DHS Director John Selig this morning to talk about the appropriation (permission to spend) that DSB will need in order to continue services outlined in the state plan after next July. The appropriation request has to be considered and approved by the general assembly during the session which will start in January. In response to congressional emphasis, DSB is moving to establish a separate transition unit of counselors to serve youth transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or jobs.

One transition counselor position would be established in each of the five DSB geographic areas and part of their role would be to establish and promote local transition support groups. The goal is to grow the VR support groups and provide information about rights and responsibilities under rehab. The budget request also includes one Benefits Counselor position, which was recommended under prior federal review and will assist consumers economic independence. Mr. Selig recommended that DSB seek the above positions through transfer within the department, with his support.

***Budget -Older Blind.*** As part of the budget request, DSB sought \$300,000 in general revenue for the Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) program, because the population is ever growing and the waiting list is already substantial. We were not successful in getting approval for DSB to go forward as a DHS legislative request to be funded by general revenue, so the agency will have to leave that action to the board and the Older Blind Advisory Committee to advocate on behalf of the Older Blind Program locally with each of your legislators.

***Budget-Certified VR Counselors.*** For the last several years, because of Congressional emphasis on the employer as a customer, DSB has been altering the functional job descriptions of the caseload staff members to intensify the focus on measurable employment outcome. To this end, the budget seeks to reclassify all caseload positions to VR counselors. If DSB can't attract and hire certified counselors (which is frequently the case) such structure would allow us to downgrade to the non-certified counselor level, set staff on the road to certification, and promote to the certified level thereafter. The rest of the budget continues existing initiatives.

### **DSB ISSUES - Field Services Report – Christy Lamas, Administrator**

Closures –The overall goal of the 2014 state plan is to have 330 people in successful employment situations for this year, ending September 30. At this point we are at 215, which compares well to last year at this time when we had 202 people in successful employment. DSB has 14 VR Counselor caseloads right now across the state so if they each average two closures per month, by the time we get to the end of September, we will meet the goal.

Jump Start – Jump Start started on June 10 and is in full swing. As usual, we are partnering with School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This year we have nineteen students. We had a little bit of a set back from Sunday to Tuesday, because the weather was not cooperating and there was an electricity outage at ASBVI. Ginny McWilliams is the field supervisor assigned to oversee Jump Start and Counselor Ebony Kelly is the DSB Jumpstart Coordinator who works directly under Ginny. At 9:00 a.m. Sunday, I received a phone call from Ebony.....”This is what has happened with the electric outage”..... “This is what we are going to do”.....and it was taken care of. By Wednesday morning all the students were at their job posts.

Small Business Program – Four different business plans are functional.

(1) Dream Mountain Kennels in Hot Springs. Matt Lyles is the counselor. They are progressing well and look to open their doors for full service hopefully by the end of July.  
(2) Awesome Sweets is also moving forward. The counselor is Debera Coleman in Little Rock. The consumer also has an Internet presence. She sells cakes and cookies. We had a demonstration in Little Rock not too long ago. She does packages for meetings; she has a catering background.

(3) New is Hogwash, a laundromat in Fayetteville. It does delivery service. The consumer was working with counselors Carolyn Jackson and Omagene Farley in the Fayetteville office. Hogwash will have a full website, coming within the next couple of weeks.

(4) Property Management Business in Fort Smith. The counselor is Tina Shores. That has proven to be very interesting. We are learning a lot about inspections and what it takes when you have a property. The business is continuing to move forward. As we get more information I will be excited to share it with you at the next meeting.

We are working with a quilting business in New Edinburg, but it is not quite as far along as the other four. It is a lady who is going to be making quilts, and she is ten miles outside of Warren. It has proven to be quite a venture and we are looking at the cost.

Helen Keller Proclamation – The Helen Keller proclamation will be presented June 26<sup>th</sup>, at the State Capitol at 9:30 a.m. in the Governor’s conference room. If you have not received an e-mail invitation it should be going out shortly.

OIB Contract – The Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) contract is in process for renewal for the state fiscal year 2015.

Rehabilitation Interns. DSB is looking for rehabilitation interns. We have met with UALR and will follow up with our other partner colleges through which we may secure interns in the fall of 2014.

Training – Best Practices Training is coming up for field services. There will be three separate sessions: July 16-18 for the supervisors, August 6-8 for the Rehab Assistants (RA’s) and Administrative Assistants (AA’s), and August 13-15 for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC’s) and Vocational Rehab Teachers (VRT’s). The agendas address the exact functions of their jobs, and we are bringing in outside resources. One resource is Mrs. Donna Walker who will be training staff on the use of NFB NEWSLINE.

Transition Unit – As Mrs. Morris stated, DSB is moving to establish a separate transition unit of counselors to serve youth transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or jobs and establish a statewide benefits counselor.

State Plan – During the December meeting, I presented the proposed goals for the 2016 state plan. The board reviewed and approved those goals allowing us to move forward to develop the 2016 state plan in line with RSA pending instructions. Prior to the March board meeting we received the RSA instructions and drafted the state plan, presenting it for review at the board meeting and in the public forum that followed. At this time, the

draft state plan has been completed, in consideration of public input and prior board direction, and is posted on the DSB website.

Recap of 2016 overall goals: DSB will be looking for new ways to increase employment opportunities to serve people who are blind and visually impaired. We will increase our services to transition students. DSB will expand its outreach efforts to include the general public as well as the unserved, underserved minorities and stake holders. We will increase the number of supported employment providers to better serve DSB consumers. We will increase the quality of supported employment providers for individuals who are blind and severely visually impaired.

Donation – Recently, the Harrison Office learned of a young man from Green Forest who was grateful to DSB for rehabilitation services received by his Grandfather. In honor of his grandfather, Kirkland Powell set up a booth at the Agricultural Appreciation Day in Green Forest to raise money for future services to consumers of DSB. I understand that he is continuing to raise money, so I will give more information on that later. Last year he did a fundraiser for an organization called Grandma’s House, which is a Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) for children who are victims of abuse. ***End of Field Services Report.***

#### **DSB ISSUES - Business and Technology Report – Jim Pearson, Administrator**

Vending – Jim Pearson reported that some locations have changed managers lately, which is done based on seniority and experience. One of the locations is a federal facility, so we have to wade through the time-consuming background checks and other standards. We recently added World Services for the Blind as a location and it is doing well. We are looking at other locations, like the new VA nursing home on the site of the current golf course at Fort Roots, the completion of which is about 18 months away. The VA canteen services will probably provide all the manned food services, but we are looking at the vending options. Plans are in the preliminary stages right now. If you have heard in the news, the VA is having a few issues at some of their facilities so that may slow that process down. Our VA site that we opened about a year ago in Fayetteville is doing real well, and we have gotten some good results out of that.

Other Projects – Business & Technology is expanding its role in the small business program and that is moving along well. Liz Whitaker is the head of our Tech Lab, and we have increased our client referrals for computer systems and training. We are also working with WSB on technology training for DSB staff. The AWARE data management system has been implemented for field staff, which involves the Business and Technology Unit because of the computer equipment. The kickoff was April 1, and we are trying to get the transition to the new system complete, which is difficult when you have turnover. ***End of Business and Technology Report***

***End of Director’s Report***

**DISCUSSION/APPROVAL OF STATE PLAN** – Christy Lamas provided details on the major strategies that go with the State Plan goals approved by the board.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Goal #1/Strategies: DSB will **increase employment opportunities** for people who are blind or severely visually impaired through continued activities with the National Employment Team (NET).

DSB Batesville Counselor Darline Tucker and I are working with the Regional VR Business network (ReVRB) on particular issues between Vocational Rehabilitation and business. ReVRB is a regional organization that researches and discusses trends in employment for Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas, and New Mexico, including where the jobs are, how clients are getting to the jobs, and how VR accesses that opportunity. Mr. Brigance is also involved in ReVRB. Last year DSB interacted with Verizon. This year we are looking at Starbucks and this is all an outgrowth of the association with the NET.

VR Goal #2/Strategies: DSB will increase its services to **transition** students through partnerships.

Adding the five new transition counselor positions will help us reach transition students more effectively. We have already completed two *Parent Summits* – one in Little Rock and one in West Memphis. The next one will be in Fayetteville, and our plan is to cover the remaining DSB areas throughout the fiscal year. This is going to help us reach not only the kids, but the parents and let them know what is going on, how to access services, and what we can do for them. We bring our staff and our clients to a location for training for a few days. Lou Talley is our supervisor over Transition. Lou is involved in the *Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP)*, which consists of 26 partner agencies and organizations including DSB, ARS, and the Department of Education. Lou is also our point person with the six-state *Transition Learning Collaborative*, to find out what is happening outside the Arkansas borders and how we can bring successful approaches into the state. Texas is particularly successful in the area of Transition.

VR Goal #3/Strategies: DSB will **expand its outreach** efforts to include the general public, as well as the unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders.

DSB has just put up a large billboard in Conway to attract attention and start a dialogue. The more we are out there in the community, the more people will know who we are and what we do. Kandy Cayce has gotten us a lot of public relations materials and we have tried very hard to make sure that these fliers, brochures, everything goes out. We do mailouts to churches and community organizations. Our counselors and vocational rehab teachers go to community events, set up booths, and talk to people in the general public. That is how we propose, under the state plan, to continue to reach this goal. We have the DSB brochures in the office and I will be happy to share them.

Supported Employment (SE) Goal #1/Strategies: **Increase the number** of acceptable Supported Employment Providers to better serve DSB consumers.

DSB has teamed up with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to identify job development/placement providers who are focused on competitive employment as opposed to those only placing individuals into subminimum wage. This tells which providers can serve our clients....what they are offering.... and what they need in order to serve our clients. We are going to invite 10 of them to provide supported employment services throughout the state.

SE Goal #2/Strategies: **Increase the quality** of SE Providers for individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired. – ARS does the certification for its providers, so what we have done is to look at what their certification process entails and determine what criteria should be in place for an SE Provider to serve DSB clients. *End of State Plan Discussion.*

Dickie Walker made a motion to approve the 2015 State Plan for submission. Ms. Sandra Edwards seconded the motion. *Motion Passed.*

**Proposed Board and Staff Calendars for Consumer of the Year (COY) and Employer of the Year (EOY)** – Dickie Walker made a motion to use the same process and same general timeline for the Consumer for the Year and Employee of the Year as followed last year for each. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. *Motion Passed.*

**DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER (DRC) REPORT** – No representative was present. No report was submitted.

**ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (AILC) REPORT** – Ms. Sha Stephens reported that her Chairperson, Mr. Adren Duncan, sent his regrets that he was unable to attend the board meeting. A report was submitted with the board packet. One of the highlights from the report was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Disability Awareness **Day at the Capitol**. Over 400 people were in attendance. We are hoping that we can continue to collaborate and make it bigger and better and hopefully do a caucus. The legislators are very excited about what we are doing. The AILC meeting is Monday at 1 p.m. at our office. We are excited for the partnership and hope to do more things to actually show you that we are meeting the goals of the state plan for Independent Living.

#### **CONSUMER INPUT:**

**American Council of the Blind** – Sandra Edwards reported that the State ACB convention was held April 25-26, 2014 at the Hilton Garden Inn in North Little Rock. There was a large turnout and a very good program. It will be held at the same place next year. The program emphasized parents of visually impaired children and the challenges that they face raising the children to be as independent as they can be. The National ACB convention will be held in July in Las Vegas. DSB Assistant Director Cassondra Williams and El Dorado VRT Jessie Thomas will represent DSB.

**National Federation of the Blind** – Terry Sheeler reported the NFB national convention is July 1-6, in Orlando, Florida. Katy Morris and Technology Specialist Gustavo

Manzanales will be in attendance. One of the programs discussed will be the new vehicle donation program. In April, NFB held a leadership program training in Little Rock. There were approximately 20 people in attendance. We are learning to build a good foundation for our group within Arkansas, getting the word out and having a strong presence within our area and the state. The state NFB state convention will be held October 3-5, in Hot Springs at Comfort Suites. The timeline for DSB counselors to send out the notice of the NFB state convention is August 15. The NFB online registration is planned to be posted this week. If people go on the NFB website and register, it does save money.

Jump Start – Board Member and ASBVI Superintendent Mr. Jim Hill thanked Katy and DSB for including School for the Blind in Jump Start. For years it has been a bright spot at the school during the summer season. It gives the young people the opportunity to get out into the community and have the experience of the real world and working on the job. It makes the business people aware of the capabilities of young people who are blind and visually impaired. I cannot tell you how many people have bragged on the kids that were in that program and have come back and said, 'hey, send us some more'. We want another Jump Start student next year. We have even gotten one into the Governor's office. The Board Chairman stated that she has had daughters in Jump Start and it is a great program. Mr. Hill proceeded to present Katy with a Jump Start T-Shirt, saying that he had often told Mrs. Morris that ASBVI appreciates DSB and that he would "give her the shirt off his back". So now, she has evidence of that fact.

Board Training – Chairman Terry Sheeler expressed her personal thanks to Mr. Terry Brigrance for the training Thursday. The training was great and we appreciate your time and consideration, and we are looking forward to continuing working with you on Board Training. Thank you for traveling all this way and taking time for us.

SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – September 12, 2014, at 1 p.m., at the Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Conference Room A.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards  
Secretary